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C O N F I D E N T I A L PRETORIA 000782

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TAGS: PREL CN SF

SUBJECT: SOUTH AFRICA TO DEPLOY 400 TROOPS TO COMOROS FOR ELECTIONS

REF: MCGREARY-BITTRICK EMAIL OF 2/9/06

Classified By: PolCounselor Gayleatha B. Brown
Reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) In response to an AU request, South Africa will deploy 400 troops to Comoros for the upcoming elections, according to Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Deputy Director for Peacekeeping, Wooter Zaayman. Zaayman told PolOff February 23 that the AU wants to send a 436-person force to Comoros (reftel) and has asked South Africa to contribute 400 troops, with Pretoria bearing the costs of its deployment. The AU mission will arrive in Comoros two weeks before the elections, and depart two weeks after the poll. Zaayman said that the mandate of the AU mission is "quite vague" at this stage. France has also agreed to provide limited military support for the operation.

¶2. (C) Zaayman said that the South African National Defense Force (SANDF) is stretched thin, but that the limited deployment timeframe made the Comoros operation possible. DepFM Pahad sent the formal inter-government request for the AU Comoros mission to DefMin Lekota the week of February 13, and the Department of Defense is working on its deployment plan.

¶3. (C) The South African Government plans to send an election observation mission to Comoros. Zaayman said that South Africa will also deploy personnel as part of a separate AU election observation delegation, but that it hopes to identify a non-South African to lead the mission (even though the SAG will likely fund much of the cost).

¶4. (C) Separately, DFA Director for the Horn of Africa and the Indian Ocean Islands, Graham Maitland, told PolOff February 16 that Comoros is an important priority for South Africa. Pretoria is working on plans to expand its "cooperation" programs with the Comoros Government following the elections. Maitland said that a joint tourism project, with the SAG Ministry of Environmental Affairs and Tourism and its Comoros counterpart, is the most developed at this stage, but that South Africa is looking at a range of possible programs.

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